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NEWSPAPER ARTICLE "FILTERS NEEDED TO PROTECT WELLS" NAS WHITING FIELD FL
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Filters needed to protect wells

The recent shutdown of two water wells at Whiting Field is one more example of what Escambia and Santa Rosa counties can expect for the immediate future.

Well shutdowns are going to become commonplace as the Department of Environmental Regulation conducts more frequent and sophisticated testing — down to parts per billion — of our underground water supplies.

Despite the inconvenience these well shutdowns might cause, it's good to know the (DER) is taking no chances when tests show even minute traces of cancer causing chemicals.

Losing some wells temporarily is simply the price to be paid in the name of public health.

DER tests this summer, for example, discovered six water wells within the city of Pensacola contaminated by trichloroethylene (TCE), a chemical solvent used as a degreaser by dry cleaning establishments.

Another recent test of a new water well on Royce Street off Ninth Avenue showed unacceptable levels of another toxic chemical.

And now two of three wells serving Whiting Field are shut down due to excessive levels of benzene in one and TCE in the second. The investigation of the Whiting wells dates back to 1984 when DER inspectors found that a battery shop at Whiting was discharging liquid waste into the ground. Subsequent tests showed the toxic chemicals had worked their way into the water table and the wells.

West Florida counties with their sandy soils are increasingly susceptible to being invaded by toxic chemicals. Moreover, we're also learning it doesn't take much of a chemical spill to shut down a well. A few hundred gallons of benzene and a million-gallon-a-day well is knocked out of commission indefinitely.

What all this is leading to is installation of carbon filters on the contaminated wells and perhaps making the filters standard equipment on any new wells in the future.

Placing carbon filters on as many well heads as possible is going to cost more but it will ease a lot of water customers' minds and might just end this irritating and, indeed, alarming shutdown of wells due to toxic chemical contamination.